

Not one monster, but four. And all with different looks. Children's author Adeline Foo takes on the bogeymen

## Alphabet Soup

Rachael Boon

Everyone has his own idea of what monsters look like. And children's book author Adeline Foo has four different takes on them.

This is thanks to the fact that she has worked with four illustrators for her four new children's books, three of which were launched at the Mint Museum of Toys yesterday. The fourth book, *Guai Wu, The Monster Child*, will be launched late next month.

On the decision to use different artists, the author says: "Monsters are creatively imagined, not a single one is the same. So my publisher and I decided to try four artists because it did not matter that the monsters would turn out different."

So in *Guai Wu, The Monster Child*, illustrated by Christine Lim Simpson, the monster looks like a Chinese boy with elfin features.

*Nu Nu, The Ring-Necked Monster* is inspired by Myanmar culture, where neck rings are still worn by tribal people.

Artist Christopher Martin, 37, has created a less intimidating creature for *The Thing Under My Bed*.

He says: "I got very excited when I knew it was about monsters. Since I was a child, I have been drawing them and I still have some sketches. The difference now is the monster is friendlier."

For *Monsters On The Wall*, art director-turned-illustrator Joshua Chiang, 33, fashioned the hero after old photos of himself.

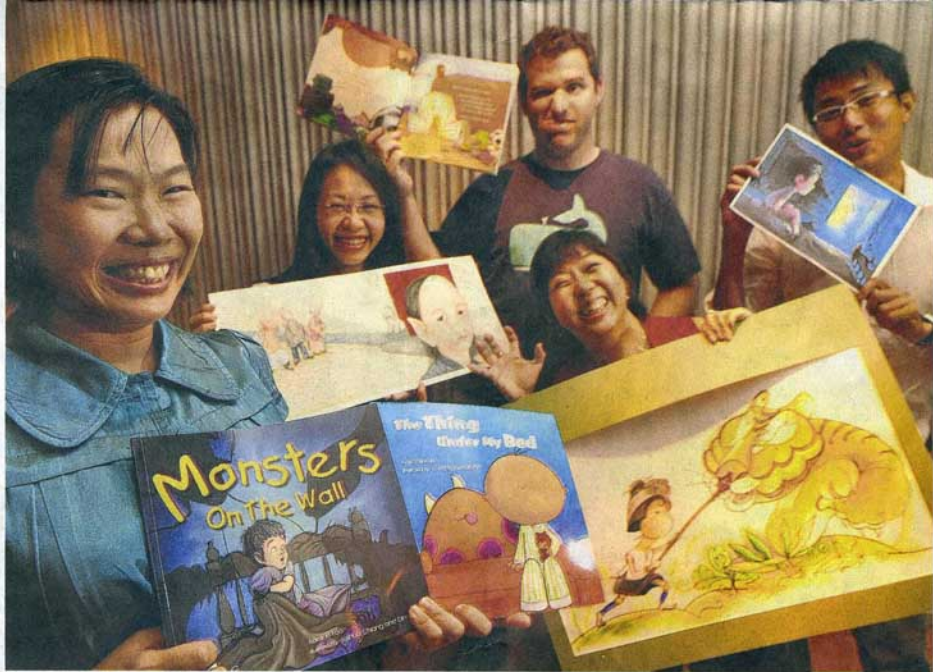
He says: "When Adeline told me they wanted it in an HDB setting, I had to dig out photos of my old house and even turned to pictures of myself as a child for inspiration."

Foo, 38, is a prolific children's book author who has written six books. The head of corporate affairs for the National Community Leadership Institute is currently on no-pay leave to take care of her children, two boys, aged nine and four, and a girl age 1 six.

She says her stories are sparked by her children.

*Monsters On The Wall*, for example, was inspired by her daughter, who spotted the magnified shadows of spiders on her bedroom walls.

Working with four illustrators posed some challenges for Foo, especially since Martin, the creative director of art company Splatter, is based in Australia.



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Creature gang (from left) author Adeline Foo, illustrators Christine Lim Simpson (*Guai Wu, The Monster Child*), Christopher Martin (*The Thing Under My Bed*), Lee Kowling (*Nu Nu, The Ring Necked Monster*) and Joshua Chiang (*Monsters On The Wall*).

# Monster mania

They worked mainly through e-mail and discussed issues on Skype. Foo says: "I wanted these collaborations to be an entirely 50-50 partnership."

She met Martin when he was passing through Singapore and was instantly sold on his art. Her partnerships with the three Singaporean illustrators arose out of serendipity.

Chiang was the art director for a short animation film based on Foo's first book. She discovered his love for pencil sketchings and Chinese martial arts, a combination which seemed perfect for the epic battle scenes she wanted in *Monsters On The Wall*.

For *Guai Wu, The Monster Child*, which is set in the Qing dynasty, she needed someone who could take up the challenge of researching Chinese culture and heritage in depth.

She met illustrator Lim Simpson, 34,

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ARTIST CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

at a picture-book conference a few years ago and recalling her love for watercolours, got in touch with her about the book.

Foo's partnership with Lee Kowling, 45, illustrator of more than 20 children's books, began when they worked on a series of Peranakan stories which were published last year.

Lee says she was immediately taken by the characters and setting for her project:

"I love Nu Nu for being loud and cheeky, and knowing the setting is Myanmar, I was excited because my mother was from Myanmar and I visited the tribes there, so I could relate and draw inspiration from that."

Foo hopes her books will help teach children moral values.

She says: "These are stories which are universal and all children will recognise, but with an Asian element."

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The author and illustrators will be making their first public appearance on Saturday at Books Kinokuniya, Ngee Ann City at 3.30pm.

*The Thing Under My Bed*, *Monsters On The Wall* and *Nu Nu, The Ring Necked Monster* (Ethos Books, \$13.50) will be available at major bookstores from Saturday.